



STATE OF MARYLAND

DHMH PRESS RELEASE

Maryland Department of Health and Mental Hygiene
201 W. Preston Street • Baltimore, Maryland 21201

Martin O'Malley, Governor – Anthony G. Brown, Lt. Governor – Joshua M. Sharfstein, Secretary

For Immediate Release:

Maryland Announces Monitoring of Air and Water for Trace Amounts of Radioactive Materials Following Japanese Nuclear Incident; Very Small Amounts Detected in Air Pose No Public Health Risk

Baltimore, MD (March 27, 2011) The Environmental Protection Agency and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention are advising today that very small amounts of radioactive materials may be detected in air and precipitation across the country using very sensitive equipment. Maryland officials are following this announcement with an update on monitoring and preparedness in the State.

“Maryland is monitoring air, water, and food supplies for trace amounts of radiation,” said Dr. Joshua M. Sharfstein, Secretary of the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene. “We have found no reason for public health concern.”

“Maryland’s ongoing surveillance on radiation has helped the State recognize and assess the present situation,” said Robert M. Summers, PhD, Acting Secretary of the Maryland Department of the Environment. “We will continue to be vigilant.”

Maryland is releasing two fact sheets today, available at www.dhmh.state.md.us.

One fact sheet, entitled “Maryland’s Surveillance and Preparedness for Radiation,” explains the extensive surveillance, planning, training, and preparedness for radiation incidents in the State of Maryland.

The second fact sheet, entitled “Iodine-131,” explains the current status of monitoring for trace amounts of radioactive Iodine in Maryland and across the country, as a result of the Japanese nuclear accident. It notes:

Air. Monitoring on the West Coast of the United States has identified very small amounts of I-131 in air samples, less than 1 picoCurie per cubic meter of air (A picocurie is one trillionth of a Curie). Maryland sensors have detected even smaller amounts of I-131 in the air, measured in femtoCuries (one-thousandth of a picoCurie). None of these levels pose a risk to health.

Water. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has reported that elevated levels of I-131 have been identified in rainwater in Massachusetts and Pennsylvania, in the range of 40 to 100 picoCuries per liter. CDC has found that the levels in the rainwater in Pennsylvania and Massachusetts are “still about 25 times below the level that would be of concern for use as a sole source of water over a short period of time, even for infants and pregnant women, who are the most sensitive to radiation.”

Tests of rainwater in Maryland have found no detectable I-131. Because rainwater is diluted by water in reservoirs and rivers or filters through the ground before reaching groundwater and is treated before reaching consumers as drinking water, it would not be expected to find levels of concern of I-131 in public water systems. Initial tests of reservoirs used for drinking water at several locations in Maryland have found no detectable I-131. There is also no public health concern for people using groundwater from properly constructed private wells.

Milk and other food. As part of ongoing Federal safety requirements, there is regular testing of milk and other selected foods for radioactivity and other potential contaminants. The federal standard for I-131 in food is 4,600 picoCuries per kilogram of food product; for milk, this would be about 4,600 picoCuries per liter. In initial milk testing, Maryland has found no detectable I-131.

The Department of Health and Mental Hygiene is not recommending any change in activities for Maryland residents. Specifically, the Health Department does not recommend that anyone take Potassium Iodide (KI). This is a protective drug for the thyroid gland to be used in case of radiation exposures far greater than any radiation exposure today in Maryland.

Maryland is continuing to test air, precipitation, water, milk, and other food and environmental samples as appropriate until the situation in Japan and its consequences resolves. As the situation in Japan changes and our monitoring continues, the Health Department may make additional recommendations for the public.

Contact for more information: Karen Black, Office of Communications, 410/767- 6490 or 410/733-5401

See also:

EPA <http://www.epa.gov/japan2011/>

CDC <http://emergency.cdc.gov/radiation/isotopes/iodine131surfacewater.asp>